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PODCAST SERIES TRANSCRIPT

Youth Sexual Violence Prevention, An interview with Patricia Cook-Craig [12:55] by Ali Mailen Perrotto for VAWnet, the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women (October 2012)

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Intro: You are listening to the applied research podcast series featuring interviews with authors exploring key research topics by VAWnet, the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women in partnership with the National Sexual Violence Resource Center and the Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse.

AP- My name is Ali Perrotto and it is October 31, 2012. Today we are speaking with Patricia Cook-Craig, the author of the Applied Research Paper entitle "Youth Sexual Violence Prevention." Patty, thank you so much for joining me today to discuss this paper. I'd like to start by asking you to share a little bit about what drew you to your research on this topic.

PC- Well thanks for having me, I'm really glad to talk about this work. I started out after getting a Masters in Social Work working in a dual domestic violence and sexual assault program and I really found one of my places in life. I really began as an early professional to understand the devastation that violence causes in people's lives. So, I began as a practitioner working in that area, but I was really struck by the fact that we, even though I was working with very committed, brilliant practitioners, we weren't changing the numbers. Violence didn't seem to be going down, so as I went to get my PhD, I wanted to figure out how to design and test program that got to point at which we were trying to prevent the problem and trying to get those numbers down.

AP- So, in this paper, you discuss some of the recent trends in youth sexual violence prevention. Can you discuss these trends, and what they mean for this work?

PC- Sure, I really talked about three things that I have experienced in what I would call the, national conversation about prevention of sexual violence especially for youth. So the first thing that I talked about was the shift toward to development and testing of primary prevention strategies. This is the idea that we're going to try and get to violence before it occurs. That's the primary part of primary prevention. I really haveheard a lot of work and discussion and seen a lot of the shift to the programming go toward this idea that we need programs that get to youth before violence has happened. So that's the first shift.

The second one is this idea that we should really be bringing into the conversation primary prevention of perpetration of sexual violence. I think that if you look historically at the work that's been done in sexual violence prevention, it's been geared a lot toward preventing victimization, which is half of the conversation. If we are good at preventing victimization, we have to also recognize that it still leaves perpetration out there. So I think that increases our risk of continuing to have this type of violence and I think I've heard lots of conversation and seen lots of work in that area.

The third things is a real push toward more comprehensive strategies. So this is, I think, an outgrowth of some of the realization in literature that says that one time presentations given to adolescents, perhaps like in the school setting, might be effective at letting them know where to go if something happens, but it hasn't really shifted the numbers in terms of preventing violence. The trend or the conversation then is, how can we really make change that cuts across the social ecology—so that would be change at the individual level, change in the relationship level, between perhaps adolescent dating partners or engaging peers to act, and then a shift in social norms in the community, and then, you know, if we do enough of that then we get societal shift. Those kinds of programs are looking more comprehensively at making long term change.

I think one of the ways that lots of people are talking about doing that is by using the prevention principles by Nations and her colleagues. The idea there is that you would try and go deep and get comprehensive about the type of programming. So you're starting to see programming that instead of one time, you're seeing things that are more long term, more varied teaching methods. Those are really the three trends that I see happening, which is trying to get at prevention before the violence occurs, trying to include preventing perpetration in the conversation, and then trying to get more comprehensive at the way we get at the problem.

AP- Thank you for that explanation, that's really helpful. What are some of the promising approaches to youth sexual violence prevention right now?

PC- Well, so, I talked about a few things in the paper. First, I think there's a really robust conversation about how to build healthy relationships. One of the sole programs we have right now that has shown evidence of reducing violence is in this area of building healthy relationships—Safe Dates. So that's one I think promising approach. There's lots going on right now in terms of engaging bystanders. There's several different types of bystander intervention programs. This is the idea that you have an act of violence that might be imminent, or you have behaviors in a community that support violence. Lots of folks are around that are bystanders to that and that can act. Some of the promising programs that have shown research evidence are Bringing in the Bystander, Green Dot. Green Dot is a program that I have had some experience with research. So that's a really robust area. There's lot of efforts to engage in youth

development, to bring in youth to help design programming and to help design strategies to prevent violence, as well as some policy development. So, those are the things that I really focused on. Of course, there's lots of ways to work on preventing this problem and I think probably if we are thinking about the most comprehensive way to get at it, we would be thinking about multiple types of programming.

AP- The advocate consultant who worked with you on this paper talked a lot with us about engaging youth and having youth involved in planning programs, so I appreciate that you brought that up in the paper. Which of these approaches have you had direct experience with? Can you share some highlights from those experiences?

PC- I've really had the most experience with the bystander intervention program called Green Dot. My experience has been to help do some evaluation research to test whether or not we have evidence of effectiveness for Green Dot. That first work began at the college setting and I'd say that most of prevention programs that you see sort of emanate from the college setting. We have a lot more experience there, but there is the realization that we need to push those programs into younger ages and I talked a little bit in the paper about how by the time adolescents get to high schoo,l violence is a part of their experience. So the ability for us to get prevention programming down to younger ages is really important and that's one of the things that I've been involved with with Green Dot. So we right now have a 5-year research project where we put Green Dot in 26 high schools and we're testing the effects of it across the social ecologic model. So we're trying to see if, you know, individual students become bystanders and do they engage their peers to also do that. And if you do enough of that then does it change the school community, do the social norms shift? That's definitely where my recent experience has been.

AP- I'm wondering if you can share some of the challenges and barriers to developing prevention programs for youth?

PC- There are lots, but I'll just mention a few that I talked about in the paper. I think really the first challenge that I have seen and had to wrestle with is just how to get good access to students. So, if we acknowledge that the programming that we need, needs to be comprehensive, that we need sufficient dosage of a program, that we need sufficient time with students, the whole challenge of like how do you work that into a student's school day, or if not in the school day, how do you get to them when their lives are really full with extracurricular activities and peer networks and those kinds of things. School is a really good place to go, because you know you have a broad audience of adolescents, but it's also a challenge because you just have to get time and there are lots of competing needs for student time in schools—that's been a challenge.

Secondly, I think that there's a couple of research challenges. If you look at sort of the history of what we've been able to evaluate, a lot of times what we're evaluating is, "do individual adolescents change?" Does their knowledge change? Do their attitudes change? Does their behavior change? But if we kind of recognize that we want change not just in individual students, but across the whole community and then into society, we have to be able to understand whether or not we've made that change and that's really hard to do.

I talked a little bit about the trend of trying to focus on the prevention of perpetration of sexual violence among adolescents. That's kind of difficult because we really don't have a very good understanding of what perpetration of adolescent sexual violence looks like. It's hard to measure, it's hard to even ask students about their perpetration experiences. That's a difficult question to get at. We really have a lot of work to do to understand this issue as well.

I think another big challenge for us in terms of developing programs, and implementing them, and then evaluating them, is just the idea that adolescents experience violence and that intersects with all of their identities. So they experience oppression in different ways, as well as violence. Designing programs that really speak to the multiple identities that adolescents have, as well as are effective at getting them to engage in reduction of violence or less perpetration or being a bystander. It's really a difficult thing to do, you know, so, the programs that we design, it's very difficult to have them adapt to every different kind of population that needs it.

AP- How do you think researchers can play a role in overcoming these challenges and moving youth prevention work forward?

PC- I think there's a couple of really big things that researchers can do. The first thing is, I think when we do get evaluation findings or evidence that something's effective, or maybe even evidence that it's not effective, I think we have to do a better job of making that knowledge accessible. VAWnet is a really good example of how to make that accessible, where you take a topic and the literature and you really work on," well, what does that mean?" But I think those efforts are really few and far between. There's kind of a gap between what researchers are doing and what practitioners on the ground are doing and how we can talk about what we know. And, the flip side to that is, one of the things that is really important is that we have different conversations with practitioners, meaning that practitioners have to be at the table when we're talking about how we design and evaluate programs, especially how we evaluate them from the beginning. I really think models like empowerment evaluation or community based participatory research are incredibly important. Really, at the end of the day, researchers should be testing what practitioners need to know. The questions should come from the practice realm and the ways to test those questions should be what the researchers engage in. I think the conversation has to shift a little bit, I think the access for practitioners to researchers and researchers to practitioners needs to become much more open. Researchers need to

engage in doing a better job of being on the ground and working hand-in-hand with practitioners to test the questions that they have.

AP- With evaluation becoming so much more important in the work that we do, I hope that we'll see that happen more and more. I want to thank you so much for taking the time to discuss your thoughts on this paper. "Youth Sexual Violence Prevention" was published in September 2012 and is available for download on VAWnet, so I encourage everyone to go and download the paper and learn more about what Patty was talking about here today and about youth prevention work in general.

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Outro: Applied Research Papers and podcasts in this audio series can be found at www.vawnet.org. VAWnet is a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence supported by a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Music by Beulah.